

ISDH Names Two New Directors

Pam Pontones, MA
ISDH Field Epidemiology Director

The Indiana State Department of Health (ISDH) has named new directors for two program areas. **Roland Gamache** will direct the state Health Data Center starting August 1, and **Michael Hurst** returned to the ISDH as the Director of the Public Health Preparedness and Emergency Response Division on July 12.

The Health Data Center is an information resource compiling data from various ISDH program areas and private partners. The Center will serve as an easy-to-use, integrated electronic environment that provides ISDH employees and others with immediate access to accurate, timely health information they need to work more effectively and efficiently. This information system will be used to drive state programs to improve the health of Indiana citizens. Although needs and needs groups are still being defined, Gamache stressed that the Health Data Center is an informational store, not a data store. "Data are points in time, but information is knowledge that we can use," he explained.

The types of data collected are based on recent Institute of Medicine reports and the ISDH Chronic Disease Management System. Health data may be provided by individuals, health care providers, facilities, and communities. Benefits of the Health Data Center include developing better ways of helping communities manage chronic diseases and other health issues, and linking surveillance data gathered from different programs, such as Epidemiology and Public Health Preparedness. Providing feedback based on information from the Health Data Center to partners is also critical. Intervention can then be targeted to specific groups to ensure the greatest benefit. "We want data that are meaningful and valuable to the community," Gamache said.

Gamache, who has a strong background in the collection, analysis, and management of data, is looking forward to his new position and spending more time on the Health Data Center project. "It's a great fit."

Hurst is also excited to return to the ISDH as director of the Public Health Preparedness and Emergency Response Division (PHPERD). He served as the ISDH Chief Legal Counsel from January through November 2001, then as Deputy Health Commissioner from November 2001 until July 2003. He left the ISDH to serve as Governor O'Bannon's Deputy Counsel from August 2003 until O'Bannon's death. Most recently he served in Governor Kernan's administration as the Public Records Access Counselor. When the PHPERD Director opportunity arose, Hurst asked to return to the ISDH. "There is important work at ISDH that is not finished yet, and I want to move that along," he explained.

One big aspect of that work is simplifying the delivery of services from the state level to the local level. One way to do this is streamlining the use of money and resources at the local level. Hurst said that having so many existing layers of scrutiny and process makes the allocation of money and resources difficult. Another goal is to facilitate relationships at the state level to all local levels, since that is where the primary response to a public health emergency will take place.

To accomplish these objectives, Hurst will draw on his knowledge of the ISDH, communication skills, and a straightforward approach. "Communication is so important. I would like to help with the really hard work of trying to implement really great ideas public health people have on the local level. It's much harder [in reality] than on paper."

Other staffing changes have occurred at the PHPERD. **Elizabeth Hibler**, formerly the Public Health Coordinator for Public Health Preparedness District 4, became the Program Director for Bioterrorism/Public Health Preparedness Grant Programs on July 12. **Mary Ann Hurrle**, formerly of the ISDH Chronic Disease Program, joined the PHPERD on June 21 as a Grants Coordinator.
